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The Nation

In Summary

Building Dams To Stop Leaks

President Reagan began last week's press conference with a smile and a quip about leaks. But his Administration doesn't seem to be fooling around in its campaign against unauthorized — some might read that "embarrassing" — disclosures.

The Pentagon, it turned out, had begun hooking up suspect employees to lie detectors early in the month after somebody blabbed about the conclusions of a secret budgetary planning session. Although a spokesman conceded that nothing that would imperil the Republic had been revealed, polygraphs might be used regularly to identify possible leakers. In his press conference, Mr. Reagan insisted that the tests had been voluntary, but that's not how several Pentagon employees remembered it.

Mr. Reagan also said that a draft Presidential directive on safeguarding national security information would "all be within the law" and would not interfere with his "determination to have an open Administration." The order would reportedly give the Government much broader authority to withhold information from public scrutiny.

Ostensibly, the Administration's primary concern is with untimely disclosures about foreign and defense policies, but officials are clearly not pleased by accounts of infighting over social and economic policy. White House chief of staff James A. Baker 3d has directed Cabinet departments to "coordinate" certain press contacts on any subject with the White House. Some minions took that to mean almost any conversation, but David R. Gergen, White House communications director, said the stricture applied only to appearances on network talk shows or on-the-record sessions with groups of newspaper reporters. Mr. Gergen was himself singled after a recent communications breakdown; cocktail party chatter he thought was off the record appeared in a Baltimore publication.

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